

During the titled Golden Age of Couturier, Millicent's taste was eclectic, another reason that she was dubbed an originator of "hippie chic." The term, of course, could only have been applied in retrospect well after her death in 1953, because "hippie" entered the popular lexicon in the sixties. Still, she did not limit herself to one designer or style. She wore Hermes (a leather cape, no less), Gres' classical Grecian-styled gowns, Mainbocher, and Schiaparelli interchangeably. Jeanne Lanvin and Valentina styles were also in her collection. She sampled them all, as they applied to her interests and imagination. It comes as no surprise that in November 1935, when *Harper's Bazaar* ran a feature called "One Woman's Winter Wardrobe," which was the magazine's prescription for how fashionable women should dress that season, the accompanying photo is of Millicent, "Madame Arturo Ramos," leaving her mother's house in Paris in a navy wool coat lined with feather monkey by Schiaparelli. Millicent added a monkey muff on her arm. While the article asserted that the stylish woman that winter would always wear a beret, Millicent wore a Tyrolean hat of her choosing and led her own dachshund alongside. She looked smashing, on her own terms, and had added her own twist to *Harper's* vision.

Diana Vreeland, the unrivaled doyenne of fashion from the late thirties when she became fashion editor of *Harper's Bazaar* through 1971 when she stepped down as editor-and chief of *Vogue*, was a friend of Millicent's who championed her fashion sense long after Millicent's death. She wrote of Millicent when she curated the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition "American Women of Style" in 1975: "She was dressed by the leading couturiers, but always, with complete assurance, she went way beyond the fashions of the time to create her own special style. She used couture to make her clothes exactly as she wanted them."

Vreeland, known for her own extraordinary style, took some cues from Millicent. They were friends, products of a similar upbringing, and crossed paths on numerous occasions in Europe and New York. After a trip to Austria in 1936, Vreeland made note in her journal of a coat - a jacket really - that Millicent had been wearing during her visit. It was a ski coat that she had modeled after an Italian truck driver's down to the same orange lining. She had added a red fox collar. The effect, fresh and eye-catching, was a classic example of Millicent's confidence, and her ability to reach out to an unrefined element, incorporate it into her own look. Through the admiration of the fashion world's players, she earned attention and promoted the style.

The same thing would happen when Vreeland was fashion editor of *Harper's Bazaar* in the late forties and Millicent arrived in New York wearing a chest full of turquoise and silver beads and a Navajo concho belt. The next thing she knew, she was being photographed by the fashion photographer Louise Dahl -Wolfe and the classic American southwestern look, so seminal to Ralph Lauren and designers to follow, had been launched. Millicent's style was her own, but its lasting impact was made through her friends, advocates and admirers in the fashion world. Her manner, mellowed from the headstrong miss who insisted on speaking only French that day in Hickson's, also

accounted for the spread of her influence. It had become apparent that fashion, for Millicent, was part play.

Vreeland had admiringly witnessed, and made note in her memoirs, of an exhibitionist streak in the young Millicent at a debutante ball the the Ritz some years earlier in New York. Millicent began the evening wearing a black silk dress with a bustle and train by the popular French designer of the day, Patou. On the pretext of having sat on some ice cream, she excused herself and returned wearing a robe of looped taffeta. Later she claimed that she had spilled coffee, and went off to change her clothes again, re-appearing in another enchanting fashion. The fashion world grooved on the legend of these episodes, and it was Edna Woolman Chase, editor of *Vogue* between 1914-1952, who retold it in her autobiography, *Glass of Fashion*.

Millicent's most important relationship in the world of fashion was made in 1930 when she went to London with a group of friends to see a talked-about young designer named Charles James. Though born in England, James would become known as the most truly American designer. In a field largely dominated by French, Italians and Russians, James uncannily understood where American style was going after World War II and proceeded to capture its essence. Millicent's name became paired with his at the height of his fame when she functioned as both his patron and muse. In the quickly changing world of twenty-first century fashion, it is hard to imagine the influence that a few key and highly respected fashion designers wielded in their time. Nearly unknown to all but fashion industry experts and aficionados today, Charles James was considered a giant, a fashion innovator on the tip of every fashionable woman's tongue in the forties and fifties. His sculpted ball gowns in lavish fabrics and inventive colors were his signature styles, though his coats and capes trimmed with fur and embroidery also left their mark. His designs have been variously called, abstract, architectural and sculptural. He considered himself an artist, and history has largely remembered him that way, for his sculpted bodices and voluminous skirts, the intricate drapings that were his trademarks. Among designers, he is often acknowledged to have been "the best," so it should come as no surprise that he would be linked to Millicent, who sought out excellence. Christian Dior credited him with creating the "New Look" as modern women stepped out of pre-war fashion and looked ahead. Millicent was equally credited with pioneering the modern "look," a style she crafted by being her own stylist. In the world of fashion, the two seemed to compliment and to feed off of each other.

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